

Washington, D.C.—Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) was sworn-in to his second term in the U.S. House of Representatives today, joined by nearly 600 of his constituents. Following the ceremony, Congressman Sestak expressed his sincere appreciation to the people of the Seventh Congressional District for their faith in reelecting him to serve as their representative during an especially important period in our nation's history. —

"I will never stop working to return the trust and respect to the citizens of the 7th Congressional District that they have placed in me," said Congressman Sestak. "There is simply no higher honor than to serve their interests and those of their fellow Americans.

"This election was not a mandate given to us by the public, but rather an opportunity for us to change how we do business in solving America's challenges – in an accountable, transparent, and non-partisan manner. Unfortunately, our government has earned a deserved reputation over the past years for increasing partisanship and, as a result, declining efficiency and effectiveness in the legislative and executive process. However, in the past two years, I have seen some excellent examples of bipartisanship, and those are the models we must use in the next Congress no matter its political composition. I am especially proud that a majority of the more than 230 measures to gain House approval in the 110th Congress have had bipartisan agreement."

As one example, Congressman Sestak worked with Duncan Hunter, the ranking Republican on the Armed Services Committee, to gain unanimous support for legislation that provides restitution to American POWs tortured in the first Iraq War -- a measure initially seen as controversial and vetoed by President Bush last year.

"Besides putting aside partisanship and politicking, achieving results in government requires leadership from elected representatives who put the good of the nation and their constituents first, even if it means placing one's self in the face of the prevailing wind," said Congressman Sestak.

Most recently, our fiscal crisis necessitated intervention. Congressman Sestak saw this early, and in February 2008, he first wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury and Chairman of the Federal Reserve regarding the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency's inability to provide student loans. Subsequently, he actively supported passage of the Emergency

Economic Stabilization Act to begin to restore the necessary flow of credit into the economy. Passing this legislation prevented an even worse economic situation.

“With the necessary bipartisanship and leadership, we have demonstrated the ability to pass legislation with concrete measures that address the issues that American people must deal with on a daily basis,” said Congressman Sestak. “We must, however, come together to do that not just in a crisis, but in forging the best America for the future in economic, health, education, defense and energy and environmental security.”

For example, in 2007, Congressman Sestak’s office was contacted by a constituent about the increasing interest rate of his daughter’s student loan. Research revealed she was the victim of predatory lending. With an understanding of this and similar situations, Congressman Sestak worked with his colleagues to pass by a 380-49 vote the Higher Education Opportunity Act, cleaning up abuses in the student loan industry. This Act requires institutions and lenders to adopt strict codes of conduct and ensures students have fair and full information about their borrowing options. This legislation became law in August of 2008.

A bipartisan approach also resulted in a vote that the National Coordinator of the non-partisan 564-member Elder Justice Coalition called “the most significant vote specifically on elder justice ever taken in the House.” After learning of cases of abuse, such as that of a man in Congressman Sestak’s District suffering from Alzheimer’s who was beaten six times with a belt buckle, the Congressman introduced the first bill on elder abuse to make it through the House in 17 years. This legislation passed unanimously with provisions that include: a comprehensive report on laws and practices; Victims Advocacy Grants to establish pilot programs for health care providers, social services employees, law enforcement and court personnel; and the creation of Emergency Crisis Response Teams to offer victims immediate, short-term emergency services.

No initiative better represents the manner in which Congress should approach its work than the new GI bill signed into law in June.

“At both Veterans Summits I hosted in my District, many young Veterans expressed challenges they faced trying to acquire a quality education and, in turn, finding a fulfilling job,” said Congressman Sestak. “Initially, some of my colleagues opposed covering the full expense of higher education. Less than a month later, 416 members voted in favor of a measure that promised a full four-year education to Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, covering costs up to that

of the most expensive in-state public school.”

In addition to this bipartisanship, Congressman Sestak stated that accountability and bringing a higher ethical standard to Washington should be priorities for the 111th Congress. In December of 2008, Congressman Sestak discussed with Bob Edgar, President and CEO of Common Cause (and former Congressman for the 7th District of Pennsylvania), ways to offer citizens comprehensive information about actions of their elected officials. In addition, they talked about steps that could be taken to ensure that voters have both access to views of candidates for public office and the ability to make their opinion count at the polls.

“Our government can only operate most effectively if there is full disclosure of officials’ actions and the influences that impact their decision-making,” said Congressman Sestak. “I am taken by the commitment of those like Common Cause to holding government accountable for working in the best interest of the American public, as well as engaging more people in democracy in general and through their efforts in particular. That is why I introduced the Independent Ethics Commission Act last session which would create an independent commission composed of retired federal judges. The Independent Ethics Commission would be allowed subpoena power to investigate alleged violations by Congressional Members and employees of the House of Representatives, and present a case of probable ethics violations to the Ethics Committee. It would allow for outside groups and individuals to file ethics complaints to be reviewed by the independent ethics commission. Having an independent ethics office would give the American people confidence in their government and restore the public trust in Congress. It will also help to limit the number of conflicts of interests and help bring accountability to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being put to good use. “The American people are fortunate to have a dedicated public servant in Bob Edgar advocating for them as he continues to champion the values upon which our nation was founded.”

Furthermore, the Congressman expressed his support for a reasonable public financing system that would help foreclose private interest groups’ funding of public campaigns, once instituted. As Bob Edgar noted in their conversation, in Connecticut, 81 percent of candidates won a campaign through public rather than private financing.

“The most important point on which Bob and I agree is that 2008 is very much the same as 1974 in that voters want accountability in government,” said Congressman Sestak. “On top of the specific concerns we addressed today, I will continue to push for legislation that establishes an independent ethics commission, a push that Bob started when he arrived on Capitol Hill. Members of Congress must recognize that we serve to benefit the people we represent. We should be held to the highest ethical standards, especially in regard to avoiding activities that

compromise our ability to accomplish that objective.”

The Congressman emphasized that during challenging times our nation requires an intense debate of ideas that leads to compromise. We must build on our successes to enhance America’s economic, health, education, energy and environment and defense securities—the five pillars of our overall national security. Examples of accountable efforts needed in these pillars include:

Economic

In 2002, Congress abandoned the bipartisan “pay-as-you-go” principle established by a Democratic Administration and a Republican Congress in the mid-1990s. In 2006, the House restored the “pay-go” system and, now, with a \$10 trillion debt— almost 50 percent owned by foreign countries—Congressman Sestak firmly supports the requirement that no program funding increase or new initiative can add to the national debt, except in times of emergency such as economic stimulus or war. He noted that as actions to help the economy begin to take hold in 2009-2010, we must address – under a “pay-as-you-go” government – the national debt, which has been the anchor weighing down our economic prospects. This will take a strong, bi-partisan approach that ensures the middle class is protected by tax relief, while a fair tax code is reinstated.

Health

The health security of our citizens is critical for America’s collective prosperity and broader national security. To accomplish this, we need a health care system which ensures everyone in America has affordable, accessible and quality health care, and is a shared responsibility between individual, society and government, and where competition and transparency of high standards will discipline costs while providing quality health care. We must also enhance Medicare and Medicaid by rewarding care givers for the quality, not the quantity of care. Our health system must focus on preventive care, early diagnosis and treatment of chronic conditions, and providing quality care, which will result in savings from a reduction in hospitalization and other expensive health services. This is a critical part of our economic prowess.

Education

While No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has helped foster both greater transparency and accountability in our schools, a failure to fully fund the program and implement the correct type of testing needs to be addressed. NCLB's provisions should be executed in a manner that supports - not penalizes - our schools and students, with an emphasis on improving math and science. Pre-K's benefits must be made much more available, while continuing efforts to rein in escalating college tuition costs as we increase financial assistance.

America must have an education system that treats schools and students fairly, that provides educators and administrators the flexibility they need to meet high standards, and that delivers to schools the resources they require to improve and succeed—while holding them accountable for the use of those resources.

Energy and Environment

Our energy policy requires a comprehensive approach that takes advantage of all types of fuel while recognizing the need to accelerate the transition to alternative, clean and renewable sources. We must hold oil companies accountable for drilling on leased property known to contain oil, increase nuclear power supply after resolving questions about waste, and invest in solar, wind and other alternatives through tax incentives.

Defense

The Congressman has always believed that the war in Iraq was a tragic misadventure which has siphoned off vital military capabilities from our engagement in Afghanistan – and especially our ability to patrol the Afghan-Pakistan border region where Al Qaeda's true leadership that plans against our country has found a long-standing haven – while harming our overall readiness. Therefore, he believes that a safe, deliberate redeployment from Iraq will allow us to focus on Afghanistan and help restore our military's overall readiness so that it can meet other contingencies globally. He also believes it is critical that the United States must engage more effectively than it has in the recent past to achieve long term diplomatic resolution to regional conflicts, such as that going on in the Middle-East.

Constituent Services and Communications

In his first term, the Congressman's staff worked nearly 10,000 constituent cases. His goal is to exceed that level of service in the next two years.

"I never forget that my primary purpose is to serve the constituents of my District" said Congressman Sestak. "As the economy presents greater challenges, there will be an increased demand for government services and we will do our best to meet that demand. Therefore, our overarching objective has to be to restore the basic health of our economy and return trust and transparency to our financial markets. But that effort – as well as returning trust and confidence in government as a whole – will need to come not just from elected officials but from a concerned, engaged citizenry. I was, therefore, impressed by the voter participation in the 2008 elections, and hope that trend will lead to even more increased engagement in the process of government by my constituents and the citizens of the United States. Our country is facing enormous challenges and as I have said before this election was not a mandate given to a particular political party by the public, but rather an opportunity for every citizen and elected official to work toward the changes the country needs together."

Congressman Sestak has committed to continuing to aggressively reach out to all of his constituents during his second term. To remain informed of his positions on key policies, Congressman Sestak urges constituents to attend his summits, (the first one in 2009 is an Education Summit taking place at the Delaware County Intermediate Unit (DCIU) beginning at 8am on February 2nd), town hall meetings, to participate in his tele-town halls, and to sign up for his electronic newsletter, or to engage via his website at www.sestak.gov, or to call his Media, PA office at 610-892-8623.

"There may never be a time when all of my constituents and I completely agree," said Congressman Sestak, "but we must always continue to listen to one another. There is a great deal of common sense and intelligence in the 7th Congressional District, and, in the end, that is what will help ensure this nation's greatness—intelligent hard work and common sense."

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group

of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.

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